Public Works & Engineering

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: July 31, 2002

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City Public Works Department's Automated Meter Reading Program Chosen Wharton Infosys Business Transformation Award Finalist

International awards recognize technological innovation

(Houston, Texas) – City of Houston Public Works and Engineering Department Director Jon C. Vanden Bosch, P.E. announced today that his department's Automated Meter Reading program was chosen as a finalist by the first annual Wharton Infosys Business Transformation Awards. Sponsored by Infosys, a world leader in consulting and information technology services, and the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School of Business, the Wharton Infosys Business Transformation Awards recognize organizations that have revolutionized their business or industry though the creative application of technology.

The City of Houston's Automated Meter Reading Program qualified as an entrant in two categories: the Organization-Wide Transformation Award and the Initiative-Led Transformation Award. Of the more than 100 applications received for these awards, forty-two were recognized as qualifiers. Among the qualifiers were Eastman Kodak Company, Dupont, Eckerd Corporation, MasterCard International, Lucent Technologies and Pier 1 Imports. The City of Houston's Automated Meter Reading Program was chosen as one of the two finalists in the Initiative-Led Transformation category with the award going to GreenPoint Mortgage. Winners in other categories included Time Warner Home Video, Capital One Financial Corporation, Schlumberger Oil Field Services and the National Stock Exchange of India, Limited.

Before the advent of the Automated Meter Reading Program, the City of Houston Department of Public Works and Engineering manually read each of the water service meters at its over 440,000 service recipients spread out over 617 square miles. The Automated Meter Reading Program is equipping each of these locations with a radio receiver and transmitter that allow the meters to be read remotely. A truck-mounted computer can read the meters from a distance of 300 feet allowing one person to perform the amount of work in a day that had previously taken 62 meter readers to accomplish.

What was a staff of 99, including meter readers and support personnel, will be reduced to a staff of nine by June 2003 without a layoff. The projected annual rate of return on capital with the new system is 55.3% with savings in direct labor and other costs projected to be $4.2 million annually. Improved revenue collection from the implementation of the program and the replacement of old meters will total an additional $33 million annually over the pre-automated program figures.

Director Vanden Bosch commented, "The innovative use of automated meter reading equipment in pit installations has set new standards for the water supply industry. Not only is Houston benefiting from the new technology, but other cities are following our lead to transform their own operations as well."

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